

# **CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF POOR READING AMONG GHANAIAN STUDENTS:**

## **A CASE STUDY OF WAMFIE ANGLICAN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to find out the causes and effects of poor reading of students or pupils and how it can be improved. Data was obtained from teachers, parents and pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School in the Bono region of Ghana. An observation, interview and questionnaire were carried out as a research instrument.

Results proved that the causes and effects of poor reading towards pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School was as a result of inadequate teaching materials, poor teacher-pupil relation and inadequate reading textbooks on the parts of the school and teachers which has led to poor reading among pupils and consequently has a negative effect in their academic performance.

From the study, it was realized that the issue of poor reading among pupils could be improved through the availability of adequate teaching and learning materials, availability of textbooks and good teacher and pupil relation.

**Keywords:** poor reading, causes, effects, pupils, academic performance, teaching and learning materials

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is the backbone of the development of every country. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines education as “a process of teaching, learning and training especially in schools or colleges to improve knowledge and develop skills.” (2004)

In our society, it is not easy to find any skilled work that does not require reading ability. Reading is an important pre- occupation of students from the lowest level to the highest level of education. Reading is a tool for understanding all subjects in every course of study in our school. Terry Thomas (1967) saw reading as the interpretation of printed or written symbols into speech, hence reading is the ability to interpret printed materials from pages. English Language is undoubtedly used as the medium of instruction from Basic Four (4) throughout the educational system in Ghana. As part of the language skills, listening and reading are interrelated and developed concurrently. English is an international language that connects Ghana and many countries in the world. Actually, English language eliminates language barriers which facilitates travelling since it is an international language and an official language for many countries like Ghana.

In view of the above, education cannot be achieved without emphasis on reading. The importance of reading in the education of a child cannot be underestimated. Reading skills are very essential since reading cuts across all subject areas. There are a lot of factors contributing to poor reading abilities of children. Among them include; wrong methods employed by teachers who teach English Language. Another factor is peer influence where pupils have a number of friends who do not attend school and as a result pass their behaviour or way of doing things to them.

The study was conducted at Wamfie Anglican Primary School, and it was observed that children's inability to read was a common problem among the pupils in the class. This problem caught the attention of the researcher when the pupils of Class Two (2) were met in their class. They were asked to read a story which was written on the chalkboard and also page one of a story book with the title "*Flower Blind*". From this, it was observed that most of the pupils could neither read nor pronounce words properly. This prompted the need to conduct this study to find solutions to this problem and make recommendations for further research.

The purpose of the study is to find out the causes and effects of the pupils' inability to read.

The study is guided by the following objectives;

- a) To investigate the causes of poor reading among pupils.
- b) To find out the effects of poor reading on academic performance of pupils.
- c) To design a strategy or activity that can be used to improve upon the reading ability of the pupils.
- d) To identify Policies that can help improve reading ability of pupils.

The study sought to answer the following questions.

- a) What are the causes of poor reading among pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School?
- b) What are the effects of poor reading on the academic performance of pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School?
- c) What activity can help improve upon the reading ability of pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School?
- d) What policies can help improve the reading ability of pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School?

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

There has always been the need to find a lasting solution to any problem identified. Normally, this requires a critical and practical analysis of the problem under study. One way of acquiring comprehensive information on the problem is to consult the literature related to it. These literatures contain findings, definitions, conclusions and recommendations of scholars who have written largely about the same issue under study. Significantly, the main focus of this section is to examine and review the various literary works on the causes, effects and recommendations to enhance the reading ability of pupils in our educational institutions.

### **2.1 Causes of Poor Reading among Pupils**

Microsoft Encarta encyclopaedia standard (2006) says ten to fifteen percent (10% - 15%) of all children had reading disabilities. That is, they read significantly below mental average. Most professionals tend to use the term “reading disabilities” to refer to discrepancy that is caused by vision, hearing or motor handicap, mental retardation, emotional distances or environmental disadvantage rather than pressure underlying neurological difficulty. Adu (1996) indicates that the term individual difference refers to a condition whereby everybody is different from the other. This is a direct result of differences in genetic, physiological and environmental difference. It is inferred from the argument of Adu (1996) that pupils reading difficulties could be as a result of physical, potential, oral and intellectual problems and many more. Adu (1996) argued further that, the inborn ability within a child can be responsible for the disparity of low or high achievement of some children.

As pointed out by Farrant (1996) the physical environment can be a powerful factor or force for the good or ill of a child’s learning processes. The arrangement of the school blocks, furniture, compound, trees and flowers, and proximity to an industrial factory for example can result in the child’s inability to carry out a successful and meaningful reading. In other words, given the

entire genetic make-up of the child, the learning environment of the child can cause his/her inability to perform meaningful reading. Pupil's inability to read can be attributed to three reasons, based on the findings from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2004). These include; A student who is reading in a room of mosquitoes buzzing around him/her, a learner who is sick and is reading a passage for understanding and a student reading in an environment where some people are noisily quarrelling.

In the case of the reader who is in a noisy environment, you will agree with no doubt that such a reader will have a divided attention. Such a reader does two things at the same time. So, it applies to a student who is sick, he/she thinks of his/her sickness and then reading at the same time. Equally to a student who reads around an environment with mosquitoes.

As we grow up, we learn a lot of things. Some of them were taught by our teachers and others were learnt informally. Background describes our knowledge of the people of the world. If you stay in the northern part of Ghana, you have a better knowledge of the people, their culture, the weather, especially in the harmattan. Similarly, to those on the coast, they have knowledge of the practices of fishermen. According to Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (2004), it is our background that helps us to understand what we read. If we cannot connect our background to what we read we shall find problems with what we are reading.

The reader's attitude to what he or she reads is another factor worthy of consideration. When a reader has no interest in what he or she reads, it becomes very difficult for him or her to understand what he or she is reading. According to Oliver and Boyd (1986), it is possible to isolate some important issues that appear to contribute to many issues of reading problems. Some pupils are slow learners. The quality of their learning is satisfactory but they appear to adapt slowly to new situations, ideas and information. By and large, these pupils would learn to read

adequately, if they are given sufficient time. But the problem often arises if they are forced into it. Oliver and Boyd again argued that very often, emotional or behavioral disturbances are symptoms of some underlying worry and stress. In this case, it is the worry and stress that causes tiredness, lack of concentration, loss of interest and of course poor reading. If a child is subjected to undue stress over a considerable length of time, then the result is poor learning attitudes. This according to Oliver and Boyd would almost inevitably create severe learning problems. They indicate some children are born in semi-literate homes where there is an inferior model of reading for them to observe and reflect.

## **2.2 Effects of poor reading on the academic performance of pupils.**

Oliver and Boyd (1986) identified two effects of poor reading: Pupils with poor reading abilities experience failure across the curriculum and may develop compensatory behavior that make teacher-pupil relationship very difficult. They maintain that slow learning, a cause of poor reading may be limited to language activities. It may be specific reading. Oliver and Boyd conclude that poor readers also have troubles with other aspects of language and the majority fails to some extent, right across the curriculum. The second effect they identified is that severe reading failure will almost certainly be accompanied by some behavioral problems. Hence, a considerable amount of pressure is brought to bear on the failing reader from both parents and teachers.

Willinsky (1950) indicates that reading is a basic life skill. It is a cornerstone for a child's success in school and indeed throughout life. Without the ability to read, opportunities for personal fulfilment and job success inevitably would be lost. Blaser (1980) says reading is undoubtedly the most important academic skill. All other subjects are dependable upon the

ability to extract meaning from written symbols. The child who has reading difficulties invariably manifests problems in other disciplines.

### **2.3 Activities to improve poor reading of pupils**

Blaser (1980) provides further recommendation as the effective measure to build reading abilities upon a pre-reading. The logical thinking components of problem solving are closely interwoven with reading ability (Signes, 1979). Direct instruction, natural experience or contrived circumstances in which logical thought is developed are likely to enhance later reading ability.

Sawyer (1975) indicates that a child who learns to recognize individual words as a basic unit of communication is better prepared to begin reading than the one who cannot identify the boundaries of a spoken or written word. Montgoonery (1977) describes assessment tool and instructional procedures based on a pattern which consist of the strokes of the pointers alphabet. Children who are trained with word recognition materials were reported to have improved significantly in reading performance.

### **2.4 The role of the Teacher in promoting reading habits of pupils**

Tsadidey (2002) advocates three activities on the part of the teacher to improve upon the reading habits of pupils. Here, a teacher makes a collection of a host of objects such as bottle tops, buttons and stench of letters of the alphabets or various geometrical shapes. These items are differentiated by size, color and shape. The child is given the box containing the assorted items according to their kind. For example, if bottle tops are from different brands of drinks, the child could be asked to sort and group the tops according to Malta, Fanta, and Guinness etc. There is some kind of mark to help the child to make the grouping. The activity is an aid to reading in that, it provides the needed training in visual discrimination. The ability to tell one size or color

from the other will prepare the “reader” to be able to state the differences existing between the various shapes of the letters of the alphabets.

Story-telling in pictures: For this activity a series of pictures are prepared by the teacher. The pictures are arranged to tell the story. The pictures should show some kind of logical connection, so that we can see a beginning and an end of some sort. The pictures are then pasted along the walls for pupils to see. Naturally, their curiosity makes them move from one picture to the other making them practice reading.

The jig-saw puzzle: A variety of jig-saw puzzles are now on sale in commercial houses and book Shops but the teacher should make his or her own. The principle is to let the child match shapes that are of different sizes. The teacher procures two pictures of the same object. He mounts one of these on a hard cardboard. He or she proceeds next to cut up this mounted picture into various shapes and sizes, thus reducing the complete picture to bits and pieces. These are then given to children to arrange so as to arrive at the original picture.

According to the Ghana Education Service communication and study skills for Un-trained Teachers Diploma in Basic Education (2004) in reading comprehension, the teacher is interested in his or her pupils reading with understanding. He or she does everything to help them to understand what they read. For example, he/she uses a lot of teaching and learning materials and explains the difficult words in the passage.

## **2.5 Student-teacher Relationship**

Don(2006), in his work titled “Guide Notes to the study of Education Volume Two” indicates that learning takes place through the organization of old ideas which permit the learner to grasp the relationship in the new problem. The teacher must prepare his/her lesson carefully and select the materials thoughtfully. These must be presented systematically by effectively linking

previous relevant knowledge with the new knowledge or material. Encourage learners to make their own discovery through trial and error to help them reflect on their performance. He also maintained that the teacher can offer group counselling to pupils who cannot learn. The teacher should provide a conducive atmosphere for pupils to interact with him/her. The teacher should identify problems of children and find solutions to them.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

The research design used in this study is centered on Action Research. The total number of pupils in the school is One hundred and forty-five (145). The total number of pupils used for this study is sixty-seven (67). Through random sampling, thirty-five (35) pupils from Class Two were selected. In this process, all the names of the pupils were written on pieces of papers and put in a container and shuffled several times and handpicked one at a time. All those whose names were picked were used to obtain a description of population characteristics without observing all the population values. Again, it was used to avoid biases in the selection process.

Observation and interview were the instruments used to collect the data for the study. During the instructional periods of various disciplines in the class, particularly in an English Reading lesson, observation was made of the teachers' mode of lesson presentation. From the observation, it was identified that most of the teachers did not use adequate teaching and learning materials. The attention which was given to pupils especially, low achievers to enable them cope and actively partake in reading process, was observed. The method used in teaching reading and the teacher's preparation of lessons was also taken into consideration. The students' participation in reading lessons was also observed.

In addition, observation was meant to see practically what teachers and pupils do during teaching and learning process. This in multiple ways helped the researcher to have the first-hand

information on the various techniques and measures developed by the researcher to stimulate pupils' interest in learning how to read.

Lastly, the researcher observed the pupils in reading a short passage during an English Reading lesson to see how they were performing in reading. This assisted the researcher to have a wide view of pupil's attitude towards reading.

After observation, the researcher thought it wise to interview some of the teachers and the pupils to get clear pictures of certain issues which were relevant to the study. The first person interviewed was the headmaster at his leisure time and the class teacher of Class Two to find out some of the causes and recommendations as well. The pupils were also interviewed. The interview was carried out by the researcher to prevent any break in communication or misinformation.

### **3.1 Data Collection Procedure**

The researcher applied three (3) interventional processes on the pupils' inability to read. These approaches were pre-intervention stage, intervention stage and post-intervention stage.

#### **3.1.1 Pre-intervention Stage**

In the pre-intervention stage, the researcher observed pupils in English comprehension sessions. The researcher realized that some pupils could not read properly and others found it difficult pronouncing most of the words correctly. First, the researcher established a conducive and cordial teacher-pupil relationship. This was done to enable the pupils to feel free, comfortable and open up to draw out information on their inability to read.

Secondly, the researcher contacted many of the pupils' parents and gave them advice on activities they could use to improve their children's reading abilities. For example, it is good to encourage children as parents to describe objects of pictures accurately or assisting them



H-a-t	-	hat
F-a-t	-	fat
M-a-t	-	mat
D-o-g	-	dog
L-o-t	-	lot
H-o-t	-	hot

Another technique that was also used in the intervention was the eclectic method of teaching reading. The technique consists of more than one method. This avoids the demerits associated with the individual techniques such as the phonic, syllabic, whole word and holistic method. It is generally agreed among investigators and teachers that the eclectic method is the best method to teach reading.

### **3.1.3 Post Intervention Stage**

During the post intervention stage, observation and monitoring was used to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategies that were employed at the intervention stage. The pupils were constantly observed and it was realized that there was improvement in their situation. They were regularly monitored by regular teacher and other personalities including parents. Results from these stakeholders indicated that there was improvement in the pupils' reading abilities.

### **3.2 Data Analysis Plan**

The data for this study was analyzed using tables, frequencies, percentages, content and context analysis. From the data the researcher tried to find out the causes of pupils' inability to read, effects of reading inability on pupils, strategies or activities to improve the ability of pupils to read and policies to improve reading ability.

#### 4.0 RESULTS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section has to do with the results, findings and discussions of the data obtained from the responses to the interview guide. A total of Fifty-Four (54) responses were selected using simple random sampling. These fifty-four (54) responses were made up of eight (8) teachers, eleven (11) parents and thirty-five (35) pupils in Class Two. The teachers and the parents were selected based on purposive sampling selection. This was analyzed using tables, frequencies and percentages.

##### 4.1 Causes of Pupils Inability to Read

FACTORS/CAUSES	RESPONDENTS		PERCENTAGES(%)	
	TEACHERS	PARENTS	TEACHERS	PARENTS
Poor teaching Methods	4	0	50	0
Lack of teaching materials	1	0	12	0
Poor pupils attitude to reading text	3	3	38	27
Lack of reading materials	0	5	0	46
Motivation for pupils to read	0	3	0	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 Causes of Pupils Inability to Read

From the Table 1, the findings point clearly to the fact that four (4) out of the eight (8) teachers who responded to the interview guide representing fifty percent (50%), accepted that poor teaching method is the main cause of the pupils' inability to read. On the same table, one (1) and three (3) of the respondents representing twelve (12) and thirty-eight (38) percent respectively

also agreed to the fact that lack of teaching materials and pupils' poor attitude to reading text are the causes of the pupils' inability to read.

On the same table, it is obvious that three (3) respondents representing twenty-seven percent (27%) of the eleven responses among parents accorded that pupils' poor attitude to reading text is the cause of the pupils' inability to read. Again, five (5) respondents and three (3) respondents representing forty-six percent (46%) and twenty-seven percent (27%) percent respectively also accepted the fact that lack of reading materials and motivation for pupils to read are the causes of the pupils' inability to read.

In the summary of the above table shown, it is factual that poor teaching methods employed by many English teachers is a major cause of the pupils' inability to read. Besides, lack of reading materials for pupils to read is also a factor that causes pupils' inability to read.

#### 4.2 Effects of Reading Inability on Pupils

EFFECTS	RESPONDENTS		PERCENTAGES(%)	
	TEACHERS	PARENTS	TEACHERS	PARENTS
School dropout	2	8	25	73
Creates hostile teacher-pupil relationship	2	0	25	0
Poor performance in all subjects	4	3	50	27
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 Effects of Reading Inability on Pupils

The Table 2 above indicates the effects of reading inability on pupils. From the table, two (2) and eight (8) respondents comprising of twenty-five (25%) and seventy-three (73%) percent respectively among teachers and parents endorsed the fact that reading inability leads to school dropout.

It is again clear from the table that two (2) respondents among the teachers also agreed that reading inability among pupils creates hostile teacher-pupils relationship.

More so, on the table, four (4) and three (3) respondents comprising of fifty (50%) and twenty-seven (27%) percent respectively also agreed to the fact that a pupils' inability to read affects the child's performance in all subject areas.

In summary of the above findings on the table, it is clearly stated that reading inability among pupils lead to school dropout and creates a hostile teacher-pupil relationship and above all, it leads to poor performance of pupils in all subjects.

#### **4.3 Strategies or Activity to Improve the Ability of Pupils to Read**

STRATEGY/ACTIVITY	RESPONDENTS			PERCENTAGES (%)		
	TEACHERS	PARENTS		TEACHERS	PARENTS	
Effective counselling of pupils	3	9	12	37	82	34
Cordial teacher-pupil relationship	1	2	8	13	18	23
Use of appropriate teaching techniques	4		15	50		43
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>

**Table 3 Strategies or Activity to Improve the Ability of Pupils to Read**

The above Table 3 provides various measuring strategies or activities that can be employed to cure the reading inabilities of pupils. The findings point clearly to the fact that three (3) respondents out of the eight (8) respondents by the teachers representing thirty-seven (37) percent accepted the fact that effective counselling of pupils will help improve the ability of pupils to read.

Again, on the same Table 3, nine (9) and twelve (12) respondents, representing eighty-two and thirty-four (34) percent respectively of both parents and pupils also endorsed that effective counselling of pupils will help improve the ability of pupils to read.

Moreover, on the same Table 3, one (1) respondent, two (2) respondents and eight(8) respondents representing thirteen, eighteen and twenty-three percent respectively for teachers, parents and pupils respectively all accepted that cordial teacher-pupil relationship will obviously help to improve the ability of the pupils to read.

Finally, on the Table 3, four (4) respondents representing fifty(50) percent and fifteen (15) respondents representing forty-three percent (43%) respectively by both teachers and pupils agreed that the use of appropriate teaching techniques will help improve the ability of pupils to read.

In conclusion, it is obviously clear that effective counselling of pupils, cordial teacher-pupil relationship and the use of appropriate teaching technique will help improve upon the ability of pupils to read.

#### 4.4 Policies to Improve Reading Ability

POLICY	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGES (%)
	TEACHERS	TEACHERS
The use of teaching and learning materials	4	50
Development of visual discrimination skills	2	25
Relating new information in the text to the background of the reader	2	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 Policies to Improve Reading Ability

The Table 4 above indicates policies that will help improve reading abilities of pupils, which is not different from pupils of Wamfie Anglican Primary School. The table shows that, out of the eight respondents, four (4) responses representing fifty percent (50%) advocated that the use of teaching and learning materials will help improve upon poor reading among pupils.

Also, on the same table, two (2) respondents representing twenty-five percent (25%) also agreed that the development of visual discrimination skills is the best policy for improving upon reading among pupils.

More so, the view of relating new information in the text to the background of the reader was agreed by twenty-five percent (25%) of the respondents.

#### **4.5 Findings of the data collected**

From the Tables above, it was discovered that factors such as poor teaching methods by teachers, lack of teaching materials, pupils' poor attitude to reading texts, lack of reading materials and lack of motivation by parents to their wards were responsible for the pupils' inability to read precisely. For instance, Table 1 shows that fifty percent (50%) of the total population of teachers attributed to the inability of the pupils to read as a result of poor teaching methods.

In Table 2, it was discovered that effects of the pupils' inability to read could be school dropout, the existence of hostile teacher-pupil relationship and poor performance in all subjects across the curriculum.

Also, from the Table 3, it indicates that effective counselling of the pupils, cordial teacher-pupil relationship and the use of appropriate teaching technique could help curb the reading problems.

#### **4.6 Summary of the Chapter**

The data collected for this research was analyzed and presented in tables with brief explanation for clear and easy understanding. The statistics involved were based on only frequencies and

percentages for the three research questions generated for the analysis. The results indicate that good teaching methods, using teaching and learning materials, good teacher-pupil relations and availability of reading textbooks as well as counselling could be used to address the problem of reading difficulties.

## **5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Summary**

This has to do with overview of the research and the methodology used in solving the problem. The problem for which this research was carried out was the inability of the pupils in Wamfie Anglican Primary School to read. The researcher, after collecting data used the instruments such as interviews and observation. Also, frequency tables and percentages were used to present and analyze the data collected.

To help improve the reading habits of pupils, appropriate teaching methods among others were employed in the study. The following suggestions were made by respondents:

- 1 Qualified English teachers should be posted to teach English
- 2 Teaching in abstract should be discouraged
- 3 Reading materials should be made available for pupils
- 4 Teachers should always observe their teaching methods or techniques with regards to their pupils' understanding and use the appropriate methods in teaching reading to pupils

### **5.2 Conclusion**

From the findings stated above, the following conclusions were arrived at: Poor teaching methods, lack of exposure to reading materials and poor pupils' attitude to reading text among others constitute the main factors of pupils' inability to read. Children are happy and learn effectively when they interact with teaching and learning materials (TLMs). When teaching and learning materials are used during a teaching process, the pupils' interest is aroused and sustained. But when this is done in abstract, it makes it difficult for them to read.

Another conclusion made is that the first thing a child learns is what is introduced to him/her during the child's early stages. The data collected showed that before the intervention, the parents were not introducing their pupils to reading materials. This made the pupils not to see the need for learning to read and enhance their love for it.

### **5.3 Recommendation**

With regard to the above work carried out, the following recommendations are worth considering:

Most pupils perceive reading to be a difficult task for the fact that they do not have positive attitudes towards reading. The researcher is therefore recommending that all English teachers should make their lessons very interesting such that it could arouse the pupils' interest and this could be done by using the child-centered method of teaching in which pupils are involved more in lesson presentation.

To enable pupils to get insight or more understanding of any English lesson, the teacher should put emphasis or make good use of teaching and learning materials (TLMs).

English teachers should also make it a point to vary their teaching techniques such that they would be able to identify the techniques which capture or arouse pupils to whatever they teach.

Motivation is something which cuts across all sectors of life and for that matter English teachers should again make it a point that pupils are motivated during reading lessons to stimulate their interest in reading. The teachers should also make use of audio-visual aids when the need arises.

The Ghana Education Service (GES) on their part should organize regular in-service training and seminar sessions to update English teachers' knowledge and skills in the subject properly.

Curriculum materials such as English textbooks and reading materials etc. should also be supplied by curriculum planners and high authorities at the appropriate time to the schools and implement them in accordance with the curriculum.

The period of carrying the research and teaching at the same time is too tasking. Research and teaching should be done at different times.

Although the researcher was able to achieve their aim with this work, it can still undergo some modification to improve its results.

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